

PARENTAL TIPS FOR INTERNET FILE-SHARING PROGRAMS

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The unrestricted access to graphic adult pornography that is available through the new Internet file-sharing programs like Music City Morpheus, BearShare, and Aimster creates new problems for parents. The obstacles that have limited children's access to pornography over the world wide web, such as credit card charges and most parental control programs, do not block access to pornography through the new file-sharing programs.

Here are some guidelines that may help concerned parents address this serious problem:

- **Know the Risks.** One reason that the new file-sharing programs are such a risk is that tech-savvy children know about these programs, but their parents don't. Parents need to know about file-sharing programs and the unrestricted access to graphic content that they provide. One way to learn more -- and to open a dialogue -- is to ask your child what they know about the programs and whether they have ever used them.
- **Communicate.** Talking with your child must be the cornerstone of your approach. Parents should know how their child is spending time on the computer and discuss what is and is not appropriate. Look for opportunities raised in the news media, movies, or school events to discuss Internet use.
- **Reduce Opportunities for Misuse.** Every family must strike the right balance between respecting a teenager's privacy and parental oversight. Consider strategies such as locating the computer in a common area and having a rule against minimizing the screen when parents enter the room. Many teenagers will understand that reasonable parental oversight helps reduce the temptation to use the computer to explore inappropriate content.
- **Don't Rely on Parental Filters.** There is no fool-proof technological "fix" to the parental issues raised by the Internet. In fact, the current versions of many of the most popular filters don't block access to pornography on file-sharing programs.
- **If You Use Parental Filters, Know Their Capabilities.** Parental filters can play a role in protecting children from inappropriate content. But parents who use filters should contact the technical support services of their software and determine whether adjustments can be made to limit or block pornographic file sharing. Some filters have this capability, but many do not. Most filters have free trial periods so parents can test them for ease and effectiveness.

For more information, here are some web sites that may be of help: SafeKids.com

(<http://www.safekids.com>); GetNetWise (www.getnetwise.org); NetSmartz (www.netsmartz.org).